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ABSTRACT

This conference paper describes an assessment model used by the graduate degree program at St. Mary College (Kansas). The degree program provides a cross-specialization in education, management, and psychology. Qualitative/Action Research for Authentic Assessment is a method for assessing students at completion of degree which provides an alternative to traditional comprehensive examinations and research papers. The assessment model was designed to lead students toward becoming analytical thinkers, self-directed learners, effective communicators with diverse audiences, and effective collaborative workers. The basis of assessment is a summary paper and a 15 minute oral presentation. The summary paper may develop out of coursework, professional work, or personal interest and is applied across the three disciplines. The student selects a faculty member to serve as mentor, who consults and collaborates on the student's research project. The oral presentation is given before an audience of students, faculty, and friends who ask questions and discuss the paper. The assessment process is intended to encourage students to reflect not only on the content of their courses, but also on the application of course learning, to integrate knowledge across disciplines, and to relate their learning to professional work in a particular context. (PRW)

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Qualitative/Action Research for Authentic Assessment

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ABSTRACT

Exiting program assessment procedures can expose analytical thinking, effective communication, self-directed learning, and collaborative work. Using oral and written assessment, qualitative/action research demonstrates a student's analysis, criticism, synthesis of educational and professional theory, and integration of academics into professional work.(42 words)

QUALITATIVE/ACTION RESEARCH FOR AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT

INTRODUCTION

Qualitative/Action Research for Authentic Assessment at Degree Completion is the model for St, Mary College in Johnson County Kansas. This assessment process was created for the graduate degree program crossing specializations in education, management, and psychology. Although the students study different content, they experience the same process and product. Students have the opportunity to take classes across the areas. Educators need psychology, psychologist need business, and business people need education. Grades show that the students have learned the content of individual classes. Still, one must ask how do we know that individual student have learned the aims and goals of the program?

In the beginning, there were many options for assessment. Most of the former graduate students in this room probably experienced some form of traditional comprehensive examinations. The use of the comprehensive exiting examination is a practice of long-standing, but has inherent weaknesses. First, it tests accumulated knowledge but not the application of accumulated knowledge. Students may verbalize what they have learned in their classes but not reflect on the application of what they have learned in their classes. Secondly, the comprehensive examination does not show that students can find and use research to produce new information for decision-making and problem-solving.

Additionally, some thought that limiting students to a traditional quantifiable research paper would not give them the appropriate tools for today's complex and context driven questions. (Ary et al 1990) In our perception, problem-solving needs understanding of what people say, what people

do, what people say they do, what people say others do, and what others say people do. This means that awareness of the theoretical, moral, social, and political issues affecting observations increases in importance for the observer.

Non-traditional assessment in the form of a portfolio was reviewed and rejected. The assessment process should reflect the world of work and not a personal and private experience. However, portfolios were adapted to the central filing system. Students place in their personal files any document that would help those writing recommendations to understand the individual's strengths and interests. Assessment design should lead students toward becoming analytical thinkers, self-directed learners, effective communicators with diverse audiences, and effective collaborative workers. (Cooper and McNergney 1991)

POPULATION

Contemporary assessment is process and out-come oriented and incorporates adult education theory, constructivist theory, and reflective thinking. In our vision, adult learners are motivated and independent. Adult learners expect to be active participants in their learning by creating a product to prove mastery of knowledge or skills. Adult individuals create knowledge by combining present experience and previous knowledge. Our particular adult population prefers exchanging ideas to reflect on integrating academic learning with professional work. They read, think, and discuss their learning because they want to become more effective professional practitioners. (Valll 1992)

The complications of today's adult populations can be seen in the enrollment for the education degree. Our students are not all traditionally trained teachers. They are nurse educators, business trainers, self-employed business owners, military officers, social workers, case managers, parent educators, principals, administrators, community college instructors, and present and future classroom

teachers. Their differences mean they do not have a common core of education/training or experience. However, we value their differences and hope to create opportunities for students to see across differences to similarities in practice.

The assessment process should encourage students to reflect not only on the content of their courses but also on the application of course learning. Our assessment mission stressed integration of knowledge across disciplines, showing relevance to professional work, and developing skills for higher-order thinking to solve and analyze problems.

SUMMARY PAPER

The'summary paper' is designed to be presented at the end of the degree program. The summary paper applies across the three degree specializations. The summary paper is a contemporary qualitative tool that uses existing information to understand the context of an environment and analyze that context to develop appropriate strategies for growth and change. As an exiting assessment process, a summary paper is an explanation, description, or investigation of a specific problem or practice in a specific setting. The student's topic should grow out of individual research, personal experience, or professional practice.

The paper could develop in the classes taken for the degree, in professional work, or out of personal need. (Eisner 1991) Students have reviewed research to develop expertise, design new programs, assess on-going activities, and investigate people, ideas, behaviors, or issues. No matter how different the topics, each written summary paper includes:

1 A literature review to explain the background of the issue,
2 A specific topic for investigation,
3 A methodology for investigation,

4 Critical analysis of findings, and
5 References.

Assessment through a summary paper demonstrates the goals of encouragement and development of reflection, critical thinking, problem-solving for present and future effective professional work.

Instead of a traditional advisor, the student selects a member of the adjunct or regular graduate faculty to serve as mentor. The mentor is a model of theory, reflection, and professional practice. The mentor consults with the student on the selection of a topic that is appropriate to the needs of the student and the nature of the chosen degree program.

The mentor is an active collaborator. Active means that completing a summary paper is a learning process for the mentor and that the process is also a learning and improvement opportunity for the student because of the mentor's leadership and guidance. This theory, action, and reflection model should affect the personal and professional practice of both mentor and student.

Besides the written paper, there is an oral presentation of a 15 minutes monologue instead of a scripted style paper. The monologue is presented before an open audience of students, faculty, and friends who ask questions and discuss the paper. The oral presentation develops from two organizational perspectives:

A. A description of how graduate course work contributed to the development of the topic for the summary paper, or

B. A description of the development of the summary paper, and how graduate course work contributed to its completion.

In addition, all students evaluate the paper in terms of the impact it had on personal growth and development.

UNIQUE

Summary paper assessment is a unique approach to reach stated goals and objectives because it stresses: individual assessment, leadership, and integration of theory and practice.

I. How do is individual assessment achieved?
   A. Within a framework, students can do different things in different ways.
   B. A student must show the application of individual learning This is usually observable because of the change in individual practice.
   C. Each student must take individual positive action for system change

II. How is leadership achieved?
   A. The summary paper is a collegial process. It is modeled in the cooperative empowerment of mentor to student and student to colleagues.
   B. The individual must be creative and accept responsibility for initiating change.
   C. The individual must model continuous improvement to show others that change and leadership come out of internal motivation.

III. How are theory and practice integrated?
   A. Students must use academic content to evaluate, innovate, or discuss professional practice.
   B. This academic work represents the real world of today's work Individuals need to know about reflection, critical thinking, problem-solving in activities like school-based management, marketing, project/grant proposals, situation analysis, or any client services.

INTEGRATION

There is a popular strategy that can be used to show the link between the class programs and the summary papers. The Shewhart Cycle, from the Deming Business Quality Model, illustrates the integration of these areas (Walton 1986). The acronym for the strategy is PDSA standing for Plan, Do, Study, and Act.

PLAN = In all classes and in the summary paper, the student must plan to gather a broad platform of knowledge for learning and reflective thinking to learn a specific subject matter or general theory.

DO = In all classes and in the summary paper, the students must apply problem-centered scholarly study transforming theory into practice.

STUDY= In all classes and in the summary paper, the students must analyze and synthesize data to determine the effects of the actions.

ACT = In all classes and in the summary paper, the students must stress continuous life-long improvement arising out of the analysis and synthesis of data.

Using the PDSA cycle illustrates the vertical integration of assessment, academic/professional performance, and academic theory. The assessment process encourages students to: (1) plan for research and a focus; (2) do by creating a plan for action; (3) study by reviewing the results of the plan; and (4) act by identifying new ideas and judgements.

The assessment process demonstrates performance by encouraging students to: (1) plan a literature review to develop a research focus; (2) do a research methodology; (3) study collected data: and (4) act on conclusions and generalizations.

The assessment process shows a foundation of academic theory by: (1) planning a base of knowledge and comprehension; (2) doing the application of knowledge; (3) studying and analyzing information; and (4) acting through synthesis and evaluation of results.

The horizontal integration of assessment instrument, academic/professional practice, and academic theory appears when: (1) students plan for research by completing a literature review and narrowing focus to demonstrate knowledge and comprehension; (2) students do by creating a plan for a methodology to demonstrate application; (3) students study by analyzing collected data to demonstrate analytical skills; (4) students act by identifying new ideas and conclusions to demonstrate synthesis and by identifying judgements and developing generalizations demonstrate evaluation.

ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENT	**PROFESSIONAL PERFORMANCE**	**ACADEMIC THEORY**
PLAN		
Research	Lit. Review	KNOWLEDGE
Topic	Focus	COMPREHENSION
DO		
Create plan	Methodology	APPLICATION
STUDY		
Analysis	Data Analysis	ANALYSIS
ACT		
New ideas	Conclusions	SYNTHESIS
Judgements	Generalize	EVALUATION

CONCLUSION

In summary, authentic assessment leads to effective individual performance and identifies how that is rooted in

integration of academic theory and professional practice. The process of qualitative/action research can lead students toward becoming analytical thinkers, self-directed learners, effective communicators, and collaborative workers. (1664 words)

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For additional information see the 1996 Graduate Division Catalog of St. Mary College in Johnson County, Overland Park, Kansas.